



# WATCHDOG

news that bites back

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## THE FUTURE OF THE NUCLEAR WEAPONS COMPLEX?

*The end of the Cold War left the production complex awash in special nuclear material and excess weapons and weapons parts with no additional mission requirement. The post-9/11 threat environment has made providing safeguards and security for these old warheads and excess materials a serious liability and a seemingly unlimited budget liability.*  
--House Appropriations FY 2006 Committee Report

Despite the end of the Cold War, funding for Department of Energy nuclear weapons programs rose 60% since 1995. For the first time in a decade the pending budget request doesn't increase from the previous fiscal year. However, 2005 funding was within 3% of peak spending for nuclear weapons under Reagan's spectacular military build-up. If Congress funds the current request, both 2005 and 2006 will be 50% above the Cold War average. Moreover, DOE plans to increase its FY 2006 request of \$6.63 billion to \$7.26 billion by 2010, spending \$34.67 billion over the next five years.

This coming fiscal year's lack of increase is clearly linked to the return of staggering federal deficits. However, other converging factors could accelerate further budget reductions and more consolidation of the nuclear weapons complex. First, there are the post-9.11 scenarios of possible terrorist attacks on nuclear facilities. Secondly, there is the new Reliable Replacement Warhead Program (see inserted fact sheet), which could radically transform the U.S.'s stockpile and prompt a smaller nuclear weapons complex.

These factors could increase pressure to further consolidate nuclear weapons programs at New Mexico's two weapons laboratories, Los Alamos and Sandia (42% of DOE's national nuclear weapons budget is already spent in NM). But given federal deficits, security threats and the Reliable Replacement Warhead Program, this should not automatically mean more programs and money for Los Alamos and Sandia.

Weapons programs could be dramatically curtailed at the only design lab outside New Mexico, Lawrence Livermore in California, which could have a boomerang impact on New Mexico but could nevertheless be a good thing. The smaller the nuclear weapons complex, the less pork-minded congressional support it will have. Narrowing political support could help strengthen the existing initial signs of congressional redirection of U.S. nuclear weapons programs. This redirection is urgently needed, given that the current Administration wants to develop a nuclear "bunker-buster", resume industrial-scale bomb production, shorten the lead-time for returning to full-scale testing, and preserve nuclear weapons forever.



cartoon by Jamie Chase

### Congressional Roundup: DOE Nuclear Weapons Budgets

Senate and House Armed Services Committees "authorize" DOE's nuclear weapons budget, and for FY2006 basically agreed with all such requests. The Senate and House Appropriations Committees actually fund money, and any differences have to be reconciled in House/Senate conference (expected beginning mid-July). Some key differences are:

- **Total DOE nuclear weapons activities:** The House cut the DOE's request of \$6.63 billion to \$6.18 billion. The Senate slightly cut it to \$6.56 billion, but under the powerful influence of Senator Pete Domenici (R-NM) shifted more funding to Los Alamos and Sandia.
- **Reliable Replacement Warhead:** The House raised DOE's request of \$9.4 million to \$25 million and the Senate raised it to \$25.35 million.
- **Robust Nuclear Earth Penetrator:** The House completely cut the requested \$4 million for a "bunker buster" while the Senate fully funded it.
- **Modern Pit Facility:** The House completely cut the requested \$7.67 million for a new industrial-scale bomb plant, but the Senate fully funded it.
- **Enhanced Test Readiness:** the House cut the DOE's request of \$25 million to shorten the lead-time for full-scale testing to \$15 million. The Senate funded it.
- **Chemical and Metallurgical Research Building Replacement Project:** The House completely cut DOE's request of \$55 million for a new plutonium pit production lab at Los Alamos. The Senate hiked it to \$65 million.
- **Nuclear Warhead Dismantlements:** The House raised DOE's request of \$35.5 million to \$110.25 million and directed the NNSA to actually do dismantlements (duh!). The Senate further cut the ridiculously low request to \$15 million.
- **National Ignition Facility (NIF):** The one good thing done by Senate Appropriations was zeroing construction funds for NIF, a laser fusion facility for nuclear weapons research. NIF was an easy target for Domenici given its cost overruns and the fact that its pork dollars would go to California, not NM.

For much more on all of the above, see the "Radioactive Pork Report" at [www.ananuclear.org](http://www.ananuclear.org).  
--Jay Coghlan

# LANL Contract: Bidders Weigh In

**In this corner** – the University of California (UC), Bechtel National, and other heavyweights have teamed up to bid on the management and operations contract for Los Alamos National Laboratory (LANL). UC has the backing of Governor Richardson and the State Legislature. UC's history of LANL management, ("That's Miss Management to you, pal!"), is well known in the Land of Enchantment. But what about Bechtel?

Northern New Mexico may be one of the last places on the planet that Bechtel has not stepped into the ring. In 2002 alone, Bechtel reportedly had some 900 projects in nearly 60 countries. In 2004, Bechtel grossed more than \$17.4 billion. They are currently in the middle of the Boston Central Artery Tunnel Project (a.k.a. the "Big Dig") and in the second year of reconstruction in Iraq. The destruction of Iraq's civic buildings and infrastructure has proved to be a billion-dollar bonanza for Bechtel. This contract, originally awarded in a secret invitation-only process, now totals more than \$1.8 billion and may eventually reach \$50 billion.

Some of Bechtel's past projects include the Hoover Dam, the Channel Tunnel, the Alaska Oil Pipeline, and the rebuilding of Kuwait after the Gulf War. Bechtel designed or built 45 US nuclear power plants. It is one of the largest water privatization companies in the world. Bechtel is no stranger to Department of Energy (DOE) nuclear sites. It currently co-partners in the management of Yucca Mountain, the Nevada Test Site, the Savannah River Site, Pantex, Y-12, and the Bettis Atomic Power Laboratory. Bechtel also plays a part in subcontracts at eight other DOE nuclear sites. Many of these projects may ring a bell for cost overruns, questionable contracts, or environmental mishaps. Bechtel is a privately held company and does not trade stock publicly, and thus is not required to reveal many of its operations.

**And in this corner** – Lockheed Martin has teamed up with the University of Texas and others. Its corporate motto is "We never forget who we're working for". One reason Lockheed may never forget who they're working for may be that Vice President Cheney's wife, Lynn Cheney, was a longtime member of its Board of Directors, stepping down only as her husband prepared to take office. As the world's No. 1 defense contractor, Lockheed receives approximately 80 percent of its revenue from the U.S. government alone. In 2004, its revenues were an estimated \$34.8 billion for its roster of missiles, jet fighters and satellites. Lockheed won the main contract for the Joint Strike Fighter, which with a budget estimated at \$200 billion, is the largest defense contract ever.

Lockheed Martin also has some experience working with DOE. It currently manages Sandia National Laboratory and co-manages the Nevada Test Site with Bechtel, of all people. [Additionally, Lockheed co-manages the British nuclear weapons complex.] In 2004, Lockheed lost a decision upholding a DOE contract default termination for waste remediation at Idaho National Laboratory's Pit 9. The court decision stated that Lockheed "had failed to progress with the work, failed to give adequate assurances that it would perform in the future, and failed to adequately explain its failure to progress, justifying the termination for default." Lockheed Martin said the \$110 million charge includes 12 percent interest on the \$54 million the company was paid and \$11 million to dispose of a facility the company built to do the work.

LANL employees have expressed concerns on the effects of a new contract on their pensions. Forbes.com has reported that Lockheed's pension fund is underfunded by \$5 billion.

**Also in the ring** – Watchdogs Nuclear Watch of New Mexico and Tri-Valley Citizens Against a Radioactive Environment ([www.trivalleycares.org](http://www.trivalleycares.org)) have teamed up. Our partnership's goals include influencing the LANL contract. We seek to ensure that the new management contract will increase openness, clean up legacy nuclear and chemical waste, improve safety for workers and for the public, strengthen whistleblower protections, and bring more civilian science and renewable energy research to LANL.

It may seem like a rough group to go toe-to-toe with, but we're not going to let the others go unchallenged.

--Scott Kovac

## DO WE REALLY NEED TO MANUFACTURE MORE PLUTONIUM?

**Move over, C-3PO and R2-D2! PU-238 is trying to stage the next big comeback.**

That's right, the government now wants to resume production of plutonium-238, used in nuclear batteries for spacecraft and espionage equipment. PU-238 is 270 times more radioactive than its nuclear weapons counterpart, PU-239. More than 300 pounds of the stuff would be produced over 30 years at the Idaho National Laboratory—costing taxpayers some 1.5 billion dollars. But as always there's an added bonus—50,000 drums of waste. Ooh, *big surprise*, they want to send some of those our way, to WIPP!

Plutonium-238 hasn't been produced since the Cold War. For a nation that has been famously described as "a wash in plutonium" it seems like a step backwards to crank out more of the stuff. One speck of PU-238 can cause cancer.

Right now, there's an opportunity for public response to this plan, due August 29. The environmental impact statement is available on-line at <http://www.consolidationeis.doe.gov>. What do you think about turning your taxes into plutonium? Read up, comment, and stay tuned.

--Sasha Pyle

## WIPP... MONSTER MOD!

In April the Department of Energy (DOE) submitted to the New Mexico Environment Department a new "monster" modification for the Waste Isolation Pilot Plant (WIPP). The modification has received the nickname "monster" because it combines three previously defeated modifications into one massive one.

This new modification will eliminate characterization (examination) of waste. This is a potentially dangerous change that could allow prohibited items to be shipped to WIPP. Instead of examining the waste, DOE intends to use paperwork, also known as "acceptable knowledge," to determine whether the waste may be disposed of at WIPP.

The "monster" modification also brings Remote Handled Transuranic (RH TRU) waste to WIPP, so hot that it needs to be robotically handled. Remember, RH TRU has been brought up time and again by DOE, and every time it has been rejected. Little has changed since the last time we saw RH TRU as a modification. This waste is potentially very dangerous and DOE still hasn't been able to demonstrate a firm grasp on its contents.

DOE also wants to more than double the amount of waste that can be stored above ground at the WIPP site. We've seen this before too, and we still have the same objections. More waste being stored on the surface means more chances for accidents and contamination. Furthermore, there is no need for this additional storage if the WIPP site makes certain that the generator sites fully characterize the waste they send.

As you may have figured out by now, we are opposed to this "monster" modification. To find out more, and to learn what you can do, come to our WIPP page: [www.nukewatch.org/wipp](http://www.nukewatch.org/wipp)

--Geoff Petrie

## LANL EXPANDS RADWASTE DUMP

Material Disposal Area "G", better known as just **Area G**, is LANL's "low-level" radioactive waste dump. This 65-acre area contains both surface waste storage areas and numerous subsurface waste landfills. Above ground, in large tent-like structures, transuranic waste resulting from nuclear weapons research and production awaits shipment to WIPP. Area G, equal in size to 49 football fields, also includes inactive, just-below-ground, unlined disposal units with depths ranging from 10 to 65 feet below the surface. There are also two pits currently accepting freshly generated "low-level" waste. Although the total excavated volume of all these just-below-ground units is over 1 million cubic yards and the extent of environmental contamination is presently unknown, the dump at Area G is **slated to increase in size**, because of the Lab's continuing nuclear weapons programs.

Please see our **new Area G fact sheet**, with background history and our recommendations, at [www.nukewatch.org](http://www.nukewatch.org). Do you agree that in today's world, nuclear weapons should have a lower priority than protecting land and water? --SK



## LAB STILL PLAYING WITH FIRE

It's fire season again. It's been 5 years since the Cerro Grande Fire burned about 47,000 acres in northern New Mexico in May 2000. The fire burned approximately 7,500 acres inside the Los Alamos National Laboratory (LANL) boundary, causing some damage to structures and property on Lab land. Some of the areas that burned were contaminated with radionuclides and chemicals. The fire required the evacuation of 18,000 residents of Los Alamos County and destroyed over 400 homes. The Cerro Grande Fire remains the most costly federal fire disaster ever, with over \$700 million in disaster expenses and paid claims.

After this wake-up call, one would hope that the Lab has had time to solve all of its wildfire-related issues. But the Defense Nuclear Facilities Safety Board, in an April 29, 2005 staff report, claims that LANL still has fire protection deficiencies. The report states that funding was cut for 2005 work on continued forest thinning and repair of vulnerable fire roads. "The result is the potential for unnecessary wildfire threats to the Lab's nuclear facilities."

The report notes that LANL still has not solved its long-standing problem with inspection, testing, and maintenance of fire protection systems such as heat detectors, smoke detectors, manual pull stations, and fire alarm notification devices. These deficiencies number in the thousands. The Safety Board also reported that the Los Alamos County Fire Department, which is funded by LANL, does not comply with the requirements of National Fire Protection Association for deployment and response time. An increase in minimum staffing levels from 28 to 45 on-duty persons was recommended.

As disastrous as Cerro Grande was, it wouldn't compare to a serious fire at one of LANL's nuclear facilities. --SK



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**mission statement**

The mission of Nuclear Watch New Mexico is to provide timely and accurate information to the public on nuclear issues in the American Southwest, and to encourage effective citizen involvement and activism in these issues. We seek to promote greater environmental protection, safe disposition of radioactive wastes, and federal policy changes that will curb the proliferation of nuclear weapons.

**Inside this issue: That Wacky, Fun-Filled Congressional Budget; Update on Our Bid to Run LANL; Lab is Still Playing with Fire; "Monster-Mods" at WIPP; Plutonium—Do We Need More?**

# What to do

- The federal House of Representatives Appropriations Committee completely cut DOE-requested funding for several big nuke programs, and it also tripled the money for warhead dismantlements (see p.1). Senate Appropriations, under the leadership of Pete Domenici (R-NM), restored the weapons money and funded only \$15 million for dismantlements. House and Senate differences will be reconciled in conference, expected beginning mid-July. **Tell your Congressional members to support the House weapons cuts and the increase for dismantlements.**

- **Deadline for comments on DOE's requested "monster modification"** to the state permit for the Waste Isolation Pilot Plant : **August 12th**. Come to [www.nukewatch.org](http://www.nukewatch.org) and e-mail the New Mexico Environment Department our **ready-to-send comments**.

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**Hiroshima Day Events•60 years since the bombing of Hiroshima•Saturday 8/6/05**

**Los Alamos Peace Project** [www.losalamospeaceproject.us](http://www.losalamospeaceproject.us) (505) 989-4489

9:30 AM – Children's Peace Statue 10<sup>th</sup> Year Birthday Party  
Ghost Ranch in Santa Fe, 401 Old Taos Hwy

11:00 AM – 10:00 PM – 7<sup>th</sup> Annual Peace Day in Santa Fe  
Rail Yard Park, Paseo de Peralta at Cerrillos Road in Santa Fe  
Performance Arts – Peace Procession – Tree of Peace Planting Ceremony  
Speakers – Comedians – Educational Exhibits – Arts and Fun for All!

**Walk, Pray & Vigil For Peace** [www.paxchristinewmexico.org](http://www.paxchristinewmexico.org)

8:00 AM – 10:00 AM - Ashley Pond, Los Alamos  
Sidewalk Vigil and Prayer Service

**It Started Here, Let's Stop It Here** [www.lasg.org](http://www.lasg.org) (505) 265-1200

10 AM – 9 PM - Ashley Pond, Los Alamos  
Speakers, Music, Workshops, and Remembrance Activities



**nuclear watch new mexico**

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